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A LETTER TO THE WHIGS.

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A LETTER TO THE WHIGS.

FRIENDS AND COUNTRYMEN,

I WISH with all my Heart, that there was no ſuch Thing as Party in this Country; that common Senſe and common Honeſty were to dictate every Man's Opinion, and that we could all draw together in the great machine of Government; but as we ſeem to be at preſent in a very diſtracted

State, ſome pulling one way, ſome another; the common Cauſe, in the mean time, falling to the Ground; it becomes every Man to ſpeak his Sentiments aloud, to advance his Opinion for the Examination of the Public, that the general Senſe of the Nation may be collected, and the moſt effectual Meaſures adopted for reſtoring Peace, Happineſs, and Unanimity to a diſtracted Country.

Before a Man preſumes to adviſe others, it is neceſſary he ſhould give ſome Account of himſelf and his Principles; I profeſs therefore that I am a Whig, and a Friend to Liberty, that I am a Diſciple of Mr. Locke, and that I abhor and

reprobate

reprobate the Ideas of Paſſive Obedience and Non-reſiſtance. So much for my Opinion in general, the Particulars will appear in the following Sheets. At the ſame Time I declare that I am for allowing Liberty of Conſcience, religious and civil, to every Man, as far as it may be enjoyed conſiſtent with the Rights, the Liberty, and the Proſperity of the Community at large. I have much to ſay upon the preſent State of this Country; the Subject is important, the Time is critical; I have neither the Talent to be eloquent, nor the Leiſure to be particular; but I muſt haſtily ſet down what occurs to me, unvarniſhed, unadorned; if it makes any Impreſſion it muſt be by its own weight,

weight, and I do not wiſh to perſuade any farther than as I ſpeak to the Feelings, and to the real Intereſts of every Subject of the Kingdom.

Much has been ſaid at this aweful Period of the Neceſſity of ſupporting Government; but before we devote our Perſons and our Purſes to ſuch a Purpoſe, it is at leaſt reaſonable to enquire what Sort of Government we are to ſupport; I need not explain to any Engliſhman, that the Conſtitution of this Country, as put together by our Forefathers, conſiſts of Three Powers; the People, who frame Laws and hold the Purſe; the Peerage, who have a negative or approving

proving Voice; and the King, who executes the Laws, and holds the Sword and the Scales, under the Good Pleaſure of the People; or what is the ſame Thing, *Quam diu ſe bene geſſerit*. Such is the Conſtitution of this Country, or rather ſuch it ought to be; for it ceaſes to be ſuch from the Moment that one Part of the Legiſlature aſſumes the Powers belonging to the other: Let us ſee then how far we have deviated from that Rule of Government traced out for us by our Britiſh and Saxon Anceſtors.

To begin with the Crown; here is a Power poſſeſſed of an immenſe Revenue, extorted from the Many, to laviſh upon the Few. A Million a Year

a Year Penny Rent, with that enormous Patronage, which the Court Kalendar exhibits, is more than enough to extend Corruption from the Head to the Heart of the Conſtitution; it is more than any weak or wicked King ſhould be truſted with; and as we have had, and may have again, Kings of that Complexion, there ſhould be a Defalcation of ſo unneceſſary a Grant: In ſhort it is evident that ſuch a Sum has never been granted for Bread Puddings, Knick-Knacks, or Gingerbread Coaches; but that it might be divided and ſquandered by thoſe, who, I ſhall ſhew hereafter, had little Right to diſpoſe of it.

Next come the Peerage, ſuppoſed to be the independent, honourable, virtuous, and hereditary Part of the Legiſlature. They ought to be ſo. But of what are they compoſed? The Bench of Biſhops, thoſe Creatures of the Crown, eager for Tranſlation, who never gave a liberal Vote; the Scotch Peers, who are the very Coach Horſes of the State Coach; and penſioned Engliſh Peers, who having ſold their Liberty and their Honour have forfeited the very Name of Engliſhmen. What avails it, that amongſt this Hoſpital of Incurables, we read the Names of a few patriotic Noblemen, who are forced every Seſſion to apologize for their Seats, by a

Proteſt againſt the Proceedings of their Colleagues?

We muſt now examine the Lower Houſe, improperly called the Repreſentatives of the People—of theſe the only reſpectable Part are the County Members, who being Perſons of large Property and good Characters, are ſuppoſed to enjoy their Seats with the Approbation of the Majority of their Conſtituents; the Remainder are either brought in upon the King's Intereſt to ſerve the Crown in Parliament againſt the People; or elſe purchaſe their Seats, in order to obtain Places and Penſions to reimburſe themſelves with Intereſt, and to vote for that Purpoſe, with any Men and any Miniſter.

Miniſter.—Such are the Powers who claim unconditional Submiſſion from the People of this Country; ſuch are the People who aſſume the Power of diſpoſing of our Money, who dictate the Forms in which we ſhall worſhip God, and who violate the perſonal Liberty of the Poor, to oblige them to fight the Battles of the Rich. But ſuch a Power, though uncontrolled, ſhall not paſs unqueſtioned; I will ſpeak and write freely of it; I will be Counſel for the People, though Hobbes and Filmer ſhould adviſe the Crown; and I truſt that in this Enquiry Truth and Reaſon will be an equal Match for Art and Sophiſtry.

If there is any Part of the Engliſh Conſtitution worth a Farthing, it is the Right of the People to give and to grant their own Money, for their own Uſe and Service, and to with-hold it from all other Purpoſes; whilſt this Right remains inviolate, much is ſafe; the Moment it is invaded, we retain but the Name of a free People.

Let us enquire then how that Matter ſtands at preſent; let us ſee what Hands are put into our Pockets; whether they are our own, or thoſe of our Repreſentatives, or whether they are the dirty Hands of Thieves and Pickpockets. I believe it is as demonſtrable as any

Propoſition in Euclid, that more than Half of the Boroughs in England are bought and ſold like Hogs in a Market. The Gentlemen Borough-mongers, the Moment the Bargain is concluded, walk into the Houſe of Commons, and vote the Supplies, with as little Shame as they bribed their Conſtituents, and take their Share of the public Money with the ſame Right as they levied it. Then come the Burgage Tenure Men, People who have bought a Perpetuity in the Houſe of Commons, a Thing unknown to the Conſtitution: Hereditary Lawgivers of the Nation, who claim a Right tranſmitted from Father to Son to tax their Fellow Subjects, and even to ſell this Right to Jews

or Turks or Negroes, if they be naturalized. After theſe we may name the Crown Boroughs, whoſe Members are choſen by the Crown, and of courſe ſent into Houſe of Commons to aſſiſt in doing what is called the King's Buſineſs there. Now, I think, the King has no Buſineſs at all in the Houſe of Commons; he may indeed ſend a Meſſage to that Houſe to deſire Supplies, for ſuch and ſuch Purpoſes, which they may grant or refuſe as they think proper: But as far as the King's Miniſters preſume to bribe or to influence the Members of the Houſe of Commons, they violate the Conſtitution. I do not ſcruple to aſſert, that thoſe who repreſent the venal, the Burgage

Tenure, and the Crown Boroughs, are not the legal conſtitutional Repreſentatives of the People of England, who ſhould be freely elected.

I muſt not forget the Scotch Members, who, I believe, are moſt of them ſent to Parliament by their own Peerage; for whatever People may think, I look upon the Scotch to be ſtill in a State of Vaſſalage. But it does not ſignify by what Means they have crept into Parliament, they are a dead Make-weight in the Scale of Government, at all Times, and under every Miniſter, and conſtantly aſſociated with the corrupt Part of the Houſe to form a conſtant unvarying legiſlative Majority, under which this Country

try ſuffers, and will continue to ſuffer, till it find Senſe and Spirit enough to *reſiſt* it.

To ſuppoſe that Two or Three hundred Men ſhould be conſtantly of the ſame Opinion upon every Queſtion that is propoſed, is too groſs an Abſurdity for Credulity to ſwallow; we muſt therefore conclude that thoſe who are the uniform Supporters of Government, whether Meaſures are right or wrong, muſt be paid for ſo doing, and we muſt know too that they are paid with the publick Money. If there were not a thouſand other Inſtances, the Proſecution of the American War muſt convince every unprejudiced and diſpaſſionate Man, that there is an Influence in the Houſe

of Commons ſuperior to Reaſon, common Senſe, and the Dictates of Humanity; Thirty or Forty Millions of Money ſquandered in this abominable Project; Thirty or Forty thouſand Engliſh Lives ſacrificed in a War upon the Subject in Behalf of the Crown, double that Number of Americans perhaps ſcalped and murdered, and treble that Number robbed and ruined, are ſo flagrant a Proof of our Corruption, as no Period of our own Hiſtory can furniſh. For can any Man tell me any one Advantage propoſed to the People of this Country in the Conqueſt and Subjection of the other! The Act of Navigation was quietly ſubmitted to, however unjuſt; we

had all the American Trade: But that was not enough. The Crown wanted a Revenue, not to bring into the Engliſh Treaſury, for that was known to be impoſſible, but to extend its own Influence by feeding its needy Dependents, to have Thirteen Cuſtom Houſes, Thirteen Exciſe Offices, Thirteen Stamp Offices, Thirteen Poſt Offices, with a Variety of other Poſts and Employments, and to devour America, with the ſame Train of Vermin to which this Country has ſo long been a Prey. As to the Right of Taxation, the only Wonder is, how it could ever have been aſſerted. If an Engliſhman had aſked himſelf the Queſtion, whether he would be

taxed

taxed by the Congreſs of America? *his Anſwer* would have been the *Defence* of the *Americans*, and fully juſtified the Reſiſtance they have made to ſo unconſtitutional a Claim.

But let us talk no more of the Americans, they have done with us, and we have done for ourſelves, or rather our Rulers have done for us; for I cannot bear to involve in the collective Body of the People in the unjuſt and impolitic Meaſure of the American War; and I hope it will not be long before the Nation at large will have an Opportunity, in their County Meetings, to waſh their Hands of the innocent Blood of an injured People.

Among the Invaſion of our Rights, and the Sources of our Corruption, I think Septennial Parliaments are not the leaſt notorious. The Parliament which voted itſelf to ſit for Seven Years might as well have voted their Perpetuity ; and, perhaps, it would not be ſaying too much to ſay, that every Act of a Septennial Parliament is vitiated by the very Power under which it is enacted. The Qualification Act too, however plauſible, is highly unjuſt; it excludes many Thouſands of the People, from whom all Power is derived, from any legiſlative Share of it; and I do not ſcruple to ſay, that the pooreſt Citizen in the Community has as good

a Right

a Right to ſit in Parliament, if elected, as the richeſt Commoner in the Land; for, I do inſiſt upon it, that no delegated Power can be be lawfully uſed to the Prejudice of thoſe by whom it is delegated.

There is a ſtrong Mark of a bad Government which this Nation wears, we are not ſuffered to carry Arms: Now, as I believe, Arms were never taken up or uſed by any People againſt a good Government, my Concluſion is obvious: But I am free to declare, that every Subject of a free Country has a Right to carry Arms, and to uſe them in his own Defence. Self-defence is the Law of Nature, and ſuperior to

every

every human Law whatever. When my Liberty, my Property, and my Life are in Danger, whether the Attack is made from within, or from without, I am at Liberty to defend myſelf: In this Caſe I will admit no Subſtitute; no mercenary Soldier can be ſo much intereſted in this great Stake as myſelf. Let every free Man ſay as much to himſelf, we ſhall then ſee the conſtituent Body of the Nation, the People, poſſeſſing one Half of the landed, and almoſt the Whole of every other Species of Property, ſtand forth in Arms to defend their deareſt and beſt Rights, whether they are threatened by an internal Conſpiracy or a foreign Foe. I

hope

hope there are more than an Hundred Thouſand Men in this Kingdom, poſſeſſing political Rights (which always implies Property) who ſtill retain the Wiſdom to prize, the Virtue to deſerve, and the Courage to fight for, the Rights of Engliſhmen; and that few will be found baſe and ſottiſh enough to ſell ſo precious an Inheritance, like Eſau, for a Meſs of Pottage.

Why are the Americans free at this Hour? becauſe they had Arms to defend themſelves when their Rights were invaded, and took them up when the Occaſion required it; and ſhall a paltry Partridge, or the Will of an idle tyrannical Eſquire, ſtand

between

between an Engliſhman and his Arms? For my Part, I am a Freeholder; I keep a Gun to defend myſelf, and my Caſtle; and I adviſe all my Neighbours, who have any Thing to loſe, to do the ſame Thing: The ſame Right, claimed and exerciſed by every free Man in this Country, would put us out of all Danger from foreign or domeſtic Enemies, and would form, under proper Regulations, the true conſtitutional Defence of the Nation.

It was thus in the Days of our Saxon Anceſtors, the whole Country was armed againſt Invaſion, and divided into Diſtricts called Wapontakes, from the Obligation every

Man was under to *take up his Weapon* in Time of Danger; and till the ſame Rights are claimed, and the ſame Cuſtom practiſed, we ſhall never be ſafe. Perhaps we never were in a more alarming Situation than at preſent; threatened from Abroad, diſtracted at Home, burthened with Taxes, the Sources of our Trade cut off, and governed by a Set of Men who ſeem determined to ſacrifice every Thing to their Intereſts and their Paſſions; that is, their Intereſt in keeping their Places, and their Deſire to cruſh thoſe who will not ſubmit to their arbitrary Government; and who have no other View in the viſionary Conqueſt of France and Spain, than that they may return,

like the Dog, to his Vomit, to *their* American War.

What then is to be done, and to whom are we to look up for Salvation? My Anſwer is, that under God Almighty we have nothing to depend upon but ourſelves, and our own Endeavours. Let us then, in the firſt Place, aſſociate for the immediate Defence of our Lives, Liberties, and Properties: Let us take up ſuch Arms as we can find; a Hundred thouſand Pitchforks in the Hands of Freemen determined to defend themſelves, are ſufficient for the Deſtruction of any Body of Mercenaries that can land in the Country: But I truſt we have more than five Times that Number, who may

may and ought to be employed in the Defence of every Part of the Iſland.

I am the more inclined to dwell upon this Article of conſtitutional Strength, as I conſider Standing Armies as a very juſt Subject of Jealouſy to this and every free Country. We have but too lately ſeen an Army of Fifty thouſand Men, implicitly obeying the Orders of the Crown in direct Oppoſition to the Intereſts of the Subject; and our Sailors (in better Times the Saviours of their Country) let looſe, like Pyrates and public Robbers, againſt the Perſons and Property of their unfortunate Countrymen; preſſed on one Hand, and bribed

on the other, to promote the favourite Meaſure of our political Suicide; nor indeed can it be wondered at, that thoſe who are treated like Slaves themſelves ſhould be indifferent about the Liberty of others. Under what Change of Circumſtances, or of Government, can they ſuffer more? Dragged about in our floating Dungeons, obliged to fight in any Cauſe, and againſt Friend or Foe, poiſoned with foul Air and putrid Proviſions, the alternate Victims of Heat and Cold, froze in North America, or melted in the Weſt Indies, what is it to them, whether Tyranny or Liberty prevails on Shore? they are not intereſted in the Queſtion.

Our Fellow Subjects in Ireland have ſet us a noble Example. They are up in Arms in their own Defence; and as their Right to carry them for this Purpoſe has not been called in Queſtion, it is to be preſumed they will not be in a Hurry to lay them down; it will be Time enough to think of that when the Reſtraints upon their Trade are taken off, their Penſion Liſt reduced, and their many Grievances redreſſed. When the great Work of Political Reformation begins on our Side of the Water, I hope the Exciſe Laws will not paſs unnoticed; and I hope that the Gentlemen who clamoured ſo loudly againſt them in a late Reign will not oppoſe their Repeal under the preſent.

It

It is diverting enough to hear the Courtiers impute our preſent Misfortunes to the Perfidy of the French and Spaniards; and ſuppoſe, becauſe we have loſt our Senſes, that all the World is run mad. The Conduct of the French and Spaniards would have been called Wiſdom and ſound Policy by our Forefathers, who eſtabliſhed the Republic of Holland; but our Meaſures have been of a Piece with thoſe of Philip the Second; and I doubt not but that our Loſſes and Diſappointments will be perfectly conformable to our Conduct.

I can hardly believe there is a Man in this Country, uninfluenced by his Paſſions, or unbiaſſed by his

Intereſt, who has given his Support to the American War. It is aſtoniſhing to think in how many Shapes Bribes have been offered to ſeduce us to our own Deſtruction; and now, at laſt, under the Pretence of a French War (which is one and the ſame Thing with that of America, having no other Cauſe or Foundation) in order to ſtrike at the little Independency left amongſt us! Commiſſions are held out to all the Sons of the Country Gentlemen to ſtop the Mouths of their Fathers; and the young Fellows are ſo fond of their Feathers and their Red Coats, that though they only jingle the Bells of a Packhorſe, they fancy themſelves Friends

of

of Liberty and the Defenders of their Country.

Before I ſay any more, I muſt intreat the Indulgence of my Readers; I am conſcious that as a Writer I am incorrect, unconnected, and diffuſe; but I hope that upon the Whole I ſhall be found to have ſaid ſomething to the Purpoſe. If I am miſtaken, it is only my Toil and Labour loſt, a Shilling ſpent, and the Letter thrown into the Fire. I am not fond of Scurrility and Abuſe, nor is it from any Malignity in my Diſpoſition that I find fault with the Meaſures or Miniſters: I will even admit, if they deſire it, that with the beſt Intentions in the World they have been

been guilty of the greateſt Errors. But I do inſiſt upon it, that if this Country had, for many Years paſt, been governed by the worſt Men in it, we could not have been reduced to a more calamitous Situation; what then does it ſignify to the Nation whether we have been ruined by an Error or a Crime? whether by determined Malice, or the Influence of the Moon? But I addreſs myſelf to thoſe who ſtill retain their Senſes or their Honour; and I aſk them, whether an immediate Reformation in our whole Syſtem of Government be not neceſſary? I aſk them, if they will concur in the Means neceſſary for ſuch a Purpoſe? I will propoſe ſuch as I think adequate; and I promiſe to adopt any that ſhall appear more effectual,

let who will offer them. There is only one Mode that occurs to me of ſtriking at the Root of Corruption, and that is to obtain a free Parliament; and there appears to me no Poſſibility of obtaining a free Parliament, but by multiplying the County Members in ſuch a Manner as that they may exceed the Borough-mongers, the Scotch, and all the venal and courtly Part of the Houſe of Commons. Till this is done no liberal or popular Vote will ever be paſſed; and I appeal to every honeſt Man in the Kingdom, whether he thinks he can be injured by ſuch a Meaſure? Neither the Rights of the King, nor thoſe of the Peerage, nor thoſe of the Commons, can be affected by it; it is nothing more than a ſalutary Pro-

viſion againſt a flagrant Abuſe—— What then ſhall we do to bring it about, ſhould the Expediency of the Meaſure be admitted? The Means are obvious, and very practicable. Let us convene in our ſeveral Counties. Let us propoſe, and candidly debate upon the Meaſure, if thought expedient. Let us petition the Crown, and both Houſes of Parliament, that every County may be permitted to ſend as many Members to Parliament as they pleaſe, the Numbers of each to be proportioned by the Land Tax; and the County of York, as being the largeſt, to ſend Ten Members for Inſtance, or as many as may give the ſound Part of the Houſe a Superiority over the corrupt. Should our Petitions be rejected (which we may hope

will not be the Caſe) it will be evident that there is a Deſign in ſome one Part of the Legiſlature to aſſume and reſerve to themſelves an unconſtitutional Power, which we have a Right to queſtion, and by all lawful Means to oppoſe: I would therefore adviſe the Counties in ſuch a Caſe to ſend no Members at all; the Conſequence of which will be, that, not being repreſented, they need not pay the Land Tax, or indeed any Tax at all: But in caſe of Extremities, and to avoid Anarchy, it may be neceſſary, if the worſt happens, that each County ſhould elect their own Members (with or without a Writ does not ſignify Sixpence) and then wait upon them in a Body to the Door of St. Stephen's Chapel.

Chapel. I queſtion whether any Man will be found bold enough to ſhut that Door, or to turn them out after they have taken their Seats. Theſe Gentlemen, though of independent Fortunes and unqueſtionable Integrity, muſt not be truſted too far, becauſe they are *Men*, and not *Angels*; they muſt therefore bind themſelves to ſit for One Year, and no longer; and to accept of neither Bribe, Place, nor Penſion. Under theſe Reſtrictions a Knave cannot betray his Country with Impunity; and an honeſt Man may be ſure of repreſenting his Conſtituents from Year to Year as long as he lives.

Such are the Outlines of the Plan I propoſe for the Redreſs of our manifold Grievances, a Plan which is open

open to the Emendations and Alterations of wiſer Heads than mine; but ſomething muſt be done, and quickly too, or we are a ruined People: It will be ſomething to have begun the great Work; if we defer it any longer, a venal Majority may have granted the Supplies for another Year, and our Money, under Scotch Councils and Scotch Armies, may be laid out in Gags for our Mouths, Yokes for our Necks, and Scourges for the Fools Backs.

I am,

My dear Countrymen,

Your faithful Friend,

AN ENGLISHMAN.

London, November 22, 1779.

Thurſday next, the 25th Inſtant, being the Firſt Day of the Meeting of Parliament, will be publiſhed,

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